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AN
A P O L O G Y
FOR THE
C L E R G Y;

With a View to expose the
GROUNDLESS ASSERTIONS

Of a late
COMMENTATOR on the 107th Psalm;

And to undeceive
The Admirers of certain Popular Declaimers,
by shewing the dangerous Consequences
of their Manner of Preaching.

Semper ego Auditor tantum, nunquamne reponam,
Vexatus toties?

JUV.

L O N D O N :

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THE ROYAL

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C L E R G Y, &c.

THE variety of opinions, in matters of religion, of which this country hath been so fruitful ever since the reformation, is the accidental effect of an excellent cause, of that freedom of debate, and *liberty of prophecyng* which hath been permitted amongst us; and which, though it may sometimes be abused to serve the purposes of the weakest and the worst of men, the canting zealot, or the designing hypocrite, will always deserve the countenance of the wisest and the best of men, the prudent patriot or the honest Christian, as being productive of the noblest consequences, as tending to place the Gospel on its proper basis, and

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to secure it, on the one hand, from the artful attacks of its open enemies, and, on the other hand, from the more dangerous wounds of its ignorant, superstitious friends. The *papists*, by banishing freedom of inquiry, may boast indeed that they have destroyed divisions in their church; but they forget that, by so doing, they have also destroyed religion itself: for, in order to guard against the possibility of error, they have absurdly denied the means necessary in order to arrive at the truth.

But though, in this land of liberty, we have been long acquainted with the extravagances of enthusiasts, and with the dreams of projectors in religion, (a more numerous tribe than our projectors in politics) it was not till of late years that these spurious children of the reformation changed their habitation, and from being the ordinary stated instructors of the tolerated meeting-house, unaccountably made way for erecting their standard within the pale of the established church. Thus, some years ago, we saw the *Westleys* and the *Whitfields* declaiming in the pulpits of this *metropolis*, and boasting that they were the only part of the church of *England* who had not deviated from its articles and subscriptions. But they soon threw off the mask; and now they enjoy, under a sanction from *Hicks's-Hall*, that
privilege

privilege of giving vent to the rankest enthusiasm, which *episcopal* jurisdiction might have deprived them of; and finding the church no sanctuary, they have made their retreat to the tabernacle, and remain a remarkable instance, that extravagant opinions in religion, though they may infect some few individuals, can never spread their contagion to the whole body of the clergy of this truly reformed church.

The *Hutchinsonian* preachers, of this day, tread the steps of their predecessors the *Methodists*. For if the *former* still continue to profess themselves members of that church, which the *latter* have deserted; we may pronounce, without any spirit of divination, that they tend, with large strides, towards a separation.

The evil that we lament, is still in its infancy. The churches of our country towns and villages are in a great measure strangers to the new fashioned divinity; which hath hitherto confined itself within the warm bed of this opulent and populous city, in whose soil it is natural to expect the richest harvest, from the vanity of some, and the credulity of others, from the weak minds and the strong passions of reformed devotees, and from the heated imaginations of enthusiasts of every denomination, collected within its

vast extent. And such is the weakness of the human heart, so apt are men to embrace the most romantic opinions in religion, when once they substitute the whims of fancy to the dictates of reason, that we may observe but too many fired with the catching contagion, and captivated with the unintelligible jargon of a set of itinerant preachers, who have imported their contraband doctrines into pulpits which none of them as yet have any stated right to, but what is acquired by prostituting themselves to the indecent canvassing of a popular election, and which few of them have even the temporary possession of, but through the indolence of a lazy incumbent, or through the compliance of a good-natured one, to officious importunity, seizing as it were the sacred rostrum by violence, a violence which I could wish denoted more of honest zeal for the *gospel of Christ*, than it doth of interested desire of applause, and resembled more the humility of the *divine* than the vanity of a *mountebank*.

I mean not by any thing I have said, or intend to say, to depart from that moderation with which all debates, but particularly debates of a religious nature, ought to be conducted. My aim is not so much to expose the leaders of these fashionable opinions, as to undeceive the numbers who have listed themselves

themselves under their banner; and while I adhere to this rule, facts will exclude the necessity of abuse, and reasoning supply the place of raillery. Nor do I assert any thing not strictly true, when I declare that nothing but a conviction of the strongest kind, that the *popular declaimers* whom I mean to censure, have really done, and are daily continuing to do injury to the cause of the gospel, could have prevailed upon me, conscious of my unacquaintance with controversy, and destitute of learning or abilities, to engage in this dispute. And yet, I flatter myself, such is the goodness of my cause, such are the absurdities of my antagonists, that it will be in the power of so weak a champion as I am, to open the eyes of many honest, though deceived Christians, who are not aware of the tendency of the opinions that they so much admire, and who, when they shall be convinced (as I think I shall convince them) that their favourite teachers are fighting the battles of infidelity, will look back with horror on the precipice they have escaped, and while they thank the instrument which interposed to save them, will warmly join in condemning the persons who had brought them into danger. But before I give you some specimens, as I propose, of the *gospel preaching*, as some term it, so much in vogue, it may
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not be improper to inquire what foundation there is, in general, for the repeated charges, made in the pulpit, by these *gospel preachers*, against the whole body of the clergy to which they belong; charges which, as uttered upon such solemn occasions, cannot but have a tendency to sink deep upon the minds of the hearers; and charges equally important, whether we consider them as relating to the conduct, or to the principles of the persons accused; to their morals as men, or to their faith as clergymen of the church of *England*.

I well remember to have heard, during the last summer, one of these popular preachers, in a certain church of this *metropolis*, (a church worthy of a better fate than to be made the receptacle of all the extravagances of enthusiasm) like another *Drawcansir*, employ a long dull discourse, in abusing a body of men, for piety or learning inferior to no society of *ecclesiastics* in the christian world; but whose character was drawn by this gentlemen, as if he believed that they were possessed of neither, and had a mind that his hearers should believe so too.—Not meaning to be personal, though one can scarcely avoid being so upon such an occasion, I would advise this *young orator* to use the reins of prudence to curb his hasty zeal, and to make himself acquainted with men, and with the world,

world, before he assumeth the authority of a censor. He was pleased in his discourse, to accuse his brethren the clergy with abandoning the care of their flocks, which he represented them as scarcely visiting, but in order to return after having *fleeced* them. But had he know any thing of the church to which he belongeth, or of the teachers of it whose characters he aspersed, he would have known what is notorious to all the world, that in general the parochial clergy, those entrusted with the care of souls throughout the kingdom, are resident on their benefices, and, with parts and learning worthy of the attention of the public, have no ambition but to discharge their function with diligence, assiduity and success. That some of the clergy, possessed of livings are *non-resident*, cannot indeed be denied; nor need it be denied, because I am satisfied, that most of those who live at a distance from their preferments, can assign such reasons for their *non-residence*, as will make it evident, that, far from disgracing their characters, it really doth service to the church. Certain it is, that *non-residence* is a nursery for the clergy. By means of it, there is kept up a *body of reserve*, over and above the number of parish ministers, ready, upon any vacancy, to succeed to an office, which they had already learned to execute. The

curates

curates, throughout *England*, are perhaps its ablest divines, at least its readiest champions in the fields of controversy. I should therefore be sorry to see *non-residence* destroyed, as this would annihilate the fund of subsisting for able a body of auxiliaries. Add to this, that a clergyman who is non-resident, is almost always employed as a clergyman in another place. Nor could the numerous places of public worship in the metropolis be properly and decently supplied, but that the additional income arising from country livings maketh amends for the inconsiderable salaries that come to the share of the readers and preachers.

These are not imaginary pleas for *non-residence*, but they occur upon taking a proper view of the matter in dispute. When the gentleman therefore, who was so severe upon the *non-residence* of some of his brethren, hath considered the matter more maturely, such no doubt is his modesty, that he will forbearing his railing accusations on this head: and I would fain hope also, that another charge, which he thought proper at the same time to urge, is equally groundless, and that he had no greater reason to accuse his brethren as *players at cards*, and partakers of improper amusements, than he appeareth to have had when he objected to them neglect of their ministerial function.

But the accusation of *negligence* and of an *unguarded conversation*, as severe as it is groundless, is but of little consequence, when compared with another that was brought against the clergy, in the same discourse, of having *corrupted the faith*. For the orator had the boldness, or, to speak plain, the effrontery, to assign it as the cause why such multitudes croud the church in which he was then preaching,—that this was the only church where the *gospel was preached*; and that it was no wonder that Christians who were in earnest about their religion should leave off going to their own churches, where the cold unedifying lectures on morality (in this manner do they speak of sermons in which the obligations of virtue are enforced and recommended) had quite excluded all thoughts of the necessity of faith in Christ.

Though I cannot be certain as to the words, I am certain that, as to the meaning, I have not misrepresented the gentleman: but why should I suppose that he will hesitate to confess that he made a declaration like the above, when I find the *Atlas* of the party asserting the same thing, in a still stronger manner, and publishing to all *England*, in print, a specimen of the libels which he scattereth amongst his hearers, twice a week, from the pulpit.

In the preface to the Commentary on the 107th Psalm, we meet with such insolent satirical abuse on the clergy, that I shall be at the pains to transcribe the very words, lest otherwise it might be thought that I exaggerate or misrepresent. "I neither (saith he, p. 6.)
 " expect applause, nor desire it, from the pre-
 " sent set of great and learned men." Here then he seemeth to disclaim all connexion with any of his brethren, as unworthy of his regard: and to put it out of all doubt that this was his meaning, please attend to the following quotations. P. 8. he saith, " It is too evident
 " a truth to be denied, that we are departed
 " from the doctrines of the reformation, and
 " yet we keep up our subscriptions to the ar-
 " ticles and homilies then established, which
 " are entirely founded upon the certainty of
 " the fall of mankind in Adam, and of
 " their recovery in *Jesus Christ*." -- Now if this be not a charge upon the clergy, as if they denied the certainty of the *fall*, and of the *redemption*, the words have no meaning at all; for, except the clergy, none are tied to subscribe to the articles and homilies. But if we wait for another paragraph or two, we shall see this still plainer. -- " I fancied (saith he, p. 8.)
 " myself quite safe while I had the scripture,
 " and the church on my side; until I found
 " a strong suspicion had gone out among the
 " *ministerial*

“ *ministerial clergy*, of my leaning towards
 “ enthusiasm.—Instead of defending the
 “ *Jew-bill* and the *marriage bill*, I rather in-
 “ sisted upon the total corruption of our na-
 “ ture by the fall, and the free and full re-
 “ demption of it through *Jesus Christ*.”
 And again in the same page, “ The ministerial
 “ clergy are welcome to call me what they
 “ please ; I honour their reproach, for I find
 “ myself in the best company by leaving
 “ theirs.” One more quotation, to be met
 with in the 9th page, and then I have done:
 “ What are we then to think of those court
 “ divines who expose their brethren, and ri-
 “ dicule them under the disgraceful name of
 “ enthusiasts, for no other reason but be-
 “ cause we make a conscience of our oaths
 “ and subscriptions, and dare not risk our
 “ eternal salvation for any present honour or
 “ preferment?”

These are hard words; and well deserve to
 be examined with care; in order to shew at
 once the spirit of the sect, and to vindicate the
 injured clergy from an accusation, which I
 am to prove to be as false as it is venomous
 and insolent. But first, even tho’ this accusa-
 tion were founded in truth, and tho’ there was
 ground for asserting that the clergy of the
 church of *England* had abandoned the doc-
 trines of the reformation, and made no consci-

ence of their oaths and subscriptions; though this would justify the acrimony of the severest discourse pronounced on such a topic, before an assembly of the persons guilty of so base an apostasy; yet to make it one great view in preaching to congregations where none of the clergy are present, to insult and defame the clergy, what end can this serve but to unsettle the minds of the ignorant, the credulous, the weak? and by telling them that the established church cannot furnish them with proper teachers, to drive them either into the superstition of the *papists*, or into the fanaticism of the *sectaries*?

This reflexion occurreth to me, even upon the supposition that there were any grounds for the charge; but this I deny to be the case: and I deny it upon evidence of which every sensible, provided he be also an impartial enquirer, must see the force.

Let me then ask this *Zoilus* of his brethren, with what face dare *he* to bring a railing accusation against any of them, of prostituting the pulpit to politics? he who in his sermons, for years past, hath abused magistrates, spoken evil of dignities, defamed the venerable prelates of the church, and insulted the legislature itself, with low sneering abuse?—Can he deny the charge? If he doth, thousands can bear witness to its truth.—Let him

him answer this also, where were his sermons upon the total corruption of our nature by the fall, and the free and full redemption of it through *Jesus Christ*, of which he boasteth so much, while his pulpit rung the alarum against the *Jew-act*, and his torrent of wild zeal upon that memorable occasion helped to kindle a fire over the nation, which the wisdom of the legislature extinguished before it had time to blaze into a flame? Is this the *gospel-preaching*, in which he glorieth so much, to sow seeds of dissatisfaction, and to spirit up the weak and the ignorant to faction, sedition, nay rebellion? Perhaps, however, the Christian doctrines omitted upon this occasion, by the great Orator of the sect, were consigned over by him to his deputies and assistants, while he himself was employed in the laudable task of counteracting the wisdom of parliament.—So far from this, that the whole tribe of *Gospel-preachers* joined in the same cry; and wherever any of them preached, nothing was heard, during some months, but the most violent and angry invectives against the legislature of their country, for passing a law whose connexion with religion was so distant, that if it merited no applause, it scarcely deserved censure.

Such, at that time, were the sermons of our preachers of the doctrines of the reformation,

mation, of our accusers of the Clergy, who, however branded as perjured men and apostates, and ridiculed under the appellation of *Court divines*, and *ministerial Clergy*, have a better sense of the dignity of the pulpit, than to prostitute it to serve the purposes of any set of men in the state; and who have learnt the duty of ministers of the Gospel better, than to employ their tongues or their pens, in defence of, or in opposition to any political faction. Let this gentleman, and others who seem proud to imitate him as a guide, lay their hands upon their hearts, and ask themselves whether they can say the same. They know they cannot; they know that they have lifted themselves the tools of an inconsiderable, though dangerous set of men, men who aim at something which they dare not avow, and whose whole merit and patriotism consist in opposing every measure, how right soever, that the administration are pleased to support. In the cause of such men, some of our popular declaimers have gone considerable lengths. For while their leader undertook to write a huge, unmeaning pamphlet against the *Jew-act*, and to retail, from time to time, in an *evening-paper*, which is the common vehicle of sedition throughout the Kingdom, libels of the most inflammatory kind, as they called in religion to act the part of disaffection; while

while he, I say, was thus employed, another, though with different success, first from the pulpit, and then from the press, undertook to represent the act with regard to clandestine marriages as inconsistent with the doctrines of the Bible, and to spirit up the deluded people of *England* to insult their governours on that account, and to dislike one of the best, the most salutary, and well meant laws, that has, of late years, been added to our statute book.

But though I have shewn the falshood of one part of the charge, so far as it relateth to the prostitution of the pulpit to politics, a charge with the greatest justice retorted on those who made it; I shall think I have done but little towards a vindication of the Clergy, if I do not also shew that they are most injuriously treated, as having *departed from the doctrines of the reformation—the fall of man in Adam, and his recovery through Jesus Christ.*

And here I must own, that it is the first time I ever heard that the fall of man, and the redemption by *Christ*, were doctrines peculiar to the reformation. I was so ignorant as to suppose, till this gentleman informed me better, that *Papists* as well as *Protestants* are sincere believers of these articles of faith, articles of faith, indeed, looked upon as fundamental by all Christians in general. And, therefore,

therefore, I wonder where I have been till now, that I should never have heard that the Clergy of the Church of *England* disbelieve them. Apostates, indeed, not only from the doctrines of the reformation, but also from the doctrines of Christianity, should I esteem them, were this the case. I should then, with their accuser, honour their reproach, and think myself in the best company by leaving theirs. But can this bold, this warm man, urge one circumstance, in confirmation of strange a charge? I answer with all the confidence inspired by truth, he cannot. The whole body of the Clergy are as firm believers of the fall of man in *Adam*, and of his recovery by *Jesus Christ*, as he or any of his followers can be supposed to be.

But have not this gentleman, and the preachers who are his assistants and imitators, been ridiculed by the Clergy, by their brethren the Court Divines, (for so he calleth every one who hath not adopted his nostrums in divinity) and represented by them as leaning towards enthusiasm on account of their sermons? The truth of the complaint is admitted. No doubt the sermons of these preachers have given great offence to the Clergy in general; who, with all their sense and learning, could not but be offended at the matter contained in them. But what hath occasioned their
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their censures?—Not the doctrines preached up, as hath been most falsely asserted; not the insisting upon the fall of man, and his redemption, the corruption of our nature, and the necessity of divine assistances, the eternity of the Son of God, manifested in the flesh, nor, in short, any of the doctrines fundamental to Christianity.—There is not, I believe, a clergyman of the church of *England* who will not readily repeat his subscription to these articles, and who doth not, from time to time, speak of these points, as they ought to be spoken of, from the pulpit. But what is blamed, what every sensible clergyman, and every serious Christian must blame, is the *Manner* in which these doctrines, fundamental it is agreed on all hands, are preached up; a manner of preaching which can serve no purposes but those of misleading the weak and the credulous, and disgusting the sober and sensible Christian; a manner of preaching calculated to introduce uncertainty into our rule of faith, to pervert scripture, so as to prove from it every thing that wild imagination can ever attempt to prove; in a word, a manner of preaching, which, by placing Christianity on such a basis as cannot hold, must furnish ample fund to its enemies, of cavilling, as if it could not be placed on any other basis.—Let me not

be thought too warm in this description. I speak the words of plain, honest indignation ; and yet not mere words, for I shall now proceed to corroborate them by proofs, by placing before the eyes of the reader some short, but striking specimens of the *Gospel preaching* so much esteemed at present in this city, and for which the persons who are so liberal in abusing their brethren the Clergy, are, like so many inspired missionaries, followed wherever they declaim by crouds of gaping admirers.

Nothing hath ever done more injury to the cause of Christianity, than the injudicious methods of defending it adopted by some of its friends. Had it not been for the many unguarded expressions of Christian divines, *Collins* could never have penned the most artful book that the cause of *Deism* can boast of, his *Grounds and reasons* ; nor the author of *Christianity not founded upon argument*, had any pretence for the grave banter which runneth through that performance. This remark is not foreign to my purpose. For certainly the method of defending Christianity made use of by the popular preachers now under our consideration, will furnish matter of cavilling and objection to the *Collins's* of our time. By labouring to extract out of scripture, proofs which only imagination, not reason

son can ever discover to be there, in support of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity the enemies of Christianity, it is natural to suppose, will exult, as if no better proofs could be assigned; and will rejoice to see preachers of the gospel building its articles of faith on the most airy, uncertain, and whimsical system, that ever entered the brain of a crazy enthusiast.

These preachers set out, at first, with notions concerning the inspiration of the holy scriptures, which must give vast advantages to cavillers. According to their plan, not only the sense, but the very words are dictated by the Holy Ghost. How little foundation there is for this notion, hath been well stated in a sensible and judicious answer to the *Commentary* on the 107th Psalm; to which, therefore, to avoid repetition, I refer. But this is a very inconsiderable part of the plan which I am now to sketch out. For not only, according to our adepts, is every word in the scripture the word of the Holy Ghost, but from a single word can they draw a demonstration of the truth of a mystery, and can find the Christian trinity and redemption, in the forced, and, at best, uncertain meaning of three *Hebrew* letters. A specimen of their abilities this way may be had from their learned labours on the etymology of the words *Elo-*

bim (God) and *Berith* (covenant), etymologies of such consequence to the truth of religion, that a late publisher of a new edition of a *Hebrew* lexicon did not scruple to insert his own discoveries, or the discoveries of some of his sect, concerning them, into the text of his author, by a sort of literary fraud, which no doubt was allowable in so good a cause. The very learned and worthy archdeacon of *Northumberland*, in his Dissertation on these two words, hath, by a most ingenious criticism, effectually exposed the followers of *Hutchinson* for their dreams on this subject. Before they began to torture the original language of the old testament, the critics in that language thought it of very little consequence whether the word *Elohim* was derived or no, or, if it was derived, what radix it most naturally sprung from. But since the late wonderful discoveries in *Hebrew*, (discoveries which will immortalize their *Hutchinson*, when those of Sir *Isaac Newton* in philosophy are exploded and forgot) *Elohim* hath been dragged out of its former obscurity, in which, alas ! it had continued for thousands of years, and its pedigree hath been traced up to a parent word of such consequence, as to be a proof both of the *trinity*, and of the *redemption*. For they have demonstrated, that *Elohim* signifieth the *Swearers*. And what Swearers?

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most undoubtedly the three persons of the ever blessed trinity, entering into a joint oath to redeem mankind.—A like most wonderful and satisfactory discovery have they made as to the derivation of the word *Berith*, which our ignorant translators and lexicographers were never at any great pains in tracing upwards to its original, provided they could only satisfy themselves that it signified a covenant. But our *Hutchinsonian* decipherers can see here a plain and most striking demonstration of the purification by Christ's death, having fixed the derivation of *Berith* (covenant) from a word which signifieth to purify.

And now, after this specimen of the amazing discoveries of our *Hebrew* cabalists, need we wonder that persons of their depth of penetration, of their liveliness of fancy, should also be able, as they boast they have been, to extract from the first chapter of the book of *Genesis*, a system of natural philosophy, subversive of the hitherto triumphant, but now forlorn principles, of the degraded *Newton*?

But to be serious. From the above specimen of the scripture learning of these preachers, it is obvious, that when once imagination is suffered to divert itself, without the restraint of sober reason, in such research-

es as these, there can be no fixed, no rational rule of judging: likenesses will be made out between things in the world the most unlike; and the doctrines of the gospel, clearly and unexceptionably revealed in the literal meaning of a thousand passages in the new testament, will lose all their certainty and evidence, when rested only upon the ridiculous whims of fanciful schemers, upon forced etymologies of words, and upon wild uncertain allegories. Must not this therefore give real uneasiness to every Christian, who would hope to see his religion always placed on a lasting foundation? Must it not occur immediately to such a serious person, that the preachers who can urge such weak, such groundless proofs in confirmation of the mysteries of the gospel, furnish *Deists* with a pretence to cry out that no better proofs can be urged? That therefore sermons filled with such visionary matter are censured by the generality of the Clergy, this, far from reflecting any disgrace on their characters, proveth only that they know the real foundations of their religion better, than those persons who insolently begin the cry of apostasy, while they themselves are furnishing arms to the enemies of the gospel.

I suppose it was a deduction from some *Hutchinsonian* first principle, concealed from every

every one but the *initiated*, that hath enabled the principal champion of these opinions, to arrive at a demonstration of a most surprising nature, a demonstration which must put all our metaphysicians and philosophers to eternal shame and silence. How long ago this important discovery was made, I have not as yet learnt; it is sufficient to my purpose, that the great discoverer boasted of it in his pulpit about three months ago, and amazed his congregation by telling them, that *he was able to demonstrate the self-existence of the second Person of the trinity, from nature, and prove it to be as plain as that two and two make four.*

I am not fond of giving names, and particularly I have an aversion to the word Enthusiast. But if an Enthusiast be a person who is self-sufficient and positive as to the certainty of what is notoriously groundless, surely he who could boast of being able to demonstrate from nature the self-existence of the second person of the Trinity, hath a just right to this appellation. Now, not to mention the novelty of applying self-existence to the second person, with regard to which he may consult *Pearson* or *Bull*; if this strange man is to be reasoned with at all, I would ask him what he could possibly mean, by talking of demonstrating from nature a point
about

about which nature must necessarily be silent, and which we could never possibly know any thing about, but from the positive declarations of holy writ? A deist, who heareth such an assertion from a Christian divine, will no doubt exult; he will triumph, in hearing a revealed truth put upon a foundation most glaringly false. For that there are no *data* in nature, from which we can form any arguments as to the modes of the existence of an infinite being, his own reason, and every one's common sense, will instantly suggest. In that very sermon, where this wild paradox was asserted, there were loud complaints made of the infidelity of the age, and many hard censures were passed both on the Clergy and on the Magistrates, as if their neglects were the principal cause of a fact not to be denied. But surely, in the opinion of every sensible man, such discourses as this will be esteemed none of the least fruitful sources of unbelief. For what wonder is it, that the mysteries of Christianity are treated with ridicule by professed enemies, when a preacher, on one of the most important mysteries, defendeth it by such assertions only, as every one of his hearers must know to be fitter for a madman confined in a cell in *Bedlam*, than for a Divine instructing his congregation from the Pulpit?

And now are the clergy to be blamed for disliking such sermons, and for not copying after such preachers? A few more instances may be necessary to support my charge. I have often read, and as often admired the 107th Psalm, as a noble hymn to the Creator, and as sounding his praises, for his providential care extended to the children of men, in all the varieties of human danger, and human misery. But, it seemeth, I had entirely mistaken its meaning, and that this psalm was never understood, before the great commentator explained it in his curious sermons lately published, to be an allegory ultimately applicable to the redemption by Christ. I grant, indeed, there is great merit in such interpretations of scripture: they cannot be executed without displaying an uncommon reach of imagination, and a most curious fund of conjecture; and the more forced and far-fetched the interpretations are, the merit must still be allowed to be the greater.

What was lately tried upon the 107th psalm, was tried by another adept in the occult qualities of *Hebrew* letters, some few years ago, and with equal success, upon the 19th psalm. And I myself was greatly edified, about the same time, by being present at a sermon, preached by the same person,

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in which, among many other curious anecdotes, we were taught that the unclean and the clean beasts in *Noah's ark* were intended to be types of the *Gentiles* and *Jews* collected into the ark of christ's church; and that the olive-branch brought by the dove was a real prophecy of the gospel of peace.

A preacher, whose scurrilous invectives against the clergy I have already taken notice of, hath got vast credit with his sect, for a skilful arrangement, the substance of two sermons, of all the texts which the concordance could point out to him, as mentioning any thing of *Vines and Vineyards*; the application of all which, to Christ and to the church, will, no doubt, do wonderful things toward the edification of Christians.

But what is this, when compared to his later labours, upon *Shepherds and Sheep*? In three or four sermons, this grand plan was brought to perfection; and a regular progress made from *Genesis* to the *Apocalypse*, in extracting, from every text where these occurred, most curious applications to Christ the shepherd of our souls. I remember, in particular, that the chapter where we read of *Jacob's* feeding his father-in-law's flock, was a most fruitful source of amazing prophecies, and wonderful types. It were to be wished that

that this ingenious Preacher would oblige the public with so remarkable a specimen of his abilities in explaining scripture, by publishing these sermons, which, with those on the allegories of the *Vines* and *Vineyards*, and that noble mystical discourse on *Matrimony*, will give the world a satisfactory specimen of the topics which our gospel-preachers expatiate so frequently upon.

Nothing is too much out of the way, not to be urged by the warm fancy of our new-fashioned preachers, as proofs of the doctrines of the gospel. I was not, therefore, much surprised when I heard one of them prove the resurrection of the body, from the budding of *Aaron's* rod : nor need it be thought too absurd to be fact, that another, in a discourse, preached, I think, before a learned university, not long ago, should urge the drunkenness of *Noah* as a passage of scripture full of important types, and pregnant with Christian mysteries.

That some ceremonies under the *Mosaic* dispensation, and before its commencement, were instituted with a view to represent what was to happen under the gospel, cannot but be admitted by every careful reader of the *Old Testament* ; but then he will also see reason for believing, that these instances are few, but important and striking : whereas the

gentlemen, whose opinions I am now considering, make every thing a type; every text is wrested into allegory, every fact hath a double meaning, and even names, like so many *Abracadabras* of magicians, contain mysteries, and can work wonders.

Now, if the sermons of our popular preachers be principally employed upon such topics, be totally confined to prove every doctrine of the *New Testament* from forced and fanciful interpretations of texts in the *Old*, is it any wonder that the *Court Clergy*, the *Ministerial Divines*, should ridicule what every sensible man must see the absurdity of? And, if such preachers have drawn down upon themselves the odious appellation of *Enthusiasts*, whom have they to thank for it but themselves?

And yet, wild and romantic as are the conceits which they retail as gospel-preaching, and as matter, for the due reception of which by their hearers, the most solemn invocations are offered up to the Holy Spirit; such hath been the artfulness of their address, so judicious hath been their application of such *Ænigmas* to female bigotry and popular ignorance, that by this means, and by seasonable invectives thrown in against the vices of the great, the wickedness of the times, the negligence of the clergy, and the
inattention

inattention of the magistrate, they have extended their influence, and acquired such authority amongst crouds of persons in the lower stations of life, whose ignorance maketh them fit tools for designing men to work upon, and who always love to hear their superiors insulted, as this gratifieth their own sullen pride, that were another *Paul* to appear in the church, he could scarcely hope to be heard with greater attention, or followed with greater assiduity, than in particular one of our preachers now is, whom incredible numbers of the weak and the superstitious populace follow from one church to another, even tho' they are treated with the same stale fare at both places by their orator, whose crude indigested compositions, without connexion of parts, unity of plan, or variety of pertinent matter, are received as so many infallible dictates of the Holy Spirit; insomuch that the bold insolent attacks of this man on the legislature of his country, were able to blow up the coals of sedition, upon a late occasion, and gave us a convincing proof how great the influence of an artful designing man, upon weak minds, may be, whenever he can persuade them, that religion is affected by any counsels of government, or brought into danger by the established laws of their country. It was by such arts,

arts, that the first perverters of *Pulpit* eloquence, the preachers of the *League*, could work up one of the most loyal and merciful of all the nations of *Europe* to barefaced rebellion, to bloody massacre, and horrid treason; that could sharpen *Clement's* dagger to stab their king *Henry III.* and gave a birth to those doctrines which made *Ravillac* glory in being the murderer of *Henry IV.* It was the preaching of the *English* sectaries, copied from the declamations of the firebrands of the *League* in *France*, that did more towards overturning the *English* constitution, and bringing *Charles I.* to the scaffold, than all the valour of a numerous army, with a *Cromwell* at their head. May we never again see such preaching prevail! may religion never again be made a tool to faction! But, if this cannot be hoped for, at least may the preachers of the church of *England* avoid this rock! May their sermons ever be directed to the ends of peace, of humanity, of christian charity, and christian obedience! And may they ever leave the detestable plan of scattering arrows, darts, and firebrands, to the gifted *Enthusiast*, and fanatical sectary!

And now, having given some specimen of the preaching so much admired at present; a specimen, which, if any thing can, must be a means of exposing the preachers; I am

naturally led to say something, before I conclude, concerning the end and design of discourses from the pulpit, from whence may be inferred what are the subjects which should be there treated of, and what are the abuses of pulpit eloquence which should be reformed.

Now, I think, a preacher should take it for granted, that every one of his hearers is a sincere believer in *Jesus Christ*. The pulpit never was intended, and never can, with any success, be made the place to instruct those from who are ignorant of Christianity, and of its fundamental doctrines: that, so far as the clergy are concerned, is best done from the desk, by catechetical lectures; and such lectures are ordered by the church, and I believe, in general, punctually executed. If I am not mistaken in my opinion concerning the end of preaching, as I think I am not, there resulteth from this a plain reason, why the duties of christian practice, recommended upon christian principles, and enforced by christian motives, should be the stated subjects of such discourses. And no sermon, on the obligations to any part of moral conduct, can be rightly conducted, without putting the hearers in mind of the benefits of the gospel dispensation, and the sanctions revealed in the *New Testament*.

I can-

I cannot help, therefore, observing the unreasonableness of the outcry raised originally by the *Methodists*, and still kept up by the *Hutchinsonians*, against their brethren, the sober uninfected part of the clergy, who, aiming to reform the wicked lives, rather than to rouse the blind passions of their hearers, have chosen moral subjects as proper heads of instruction from the pulpit ; a choice which, tho' wisely and honestly made, hath occasioned their being branded as betrayers of the *Gospel*, and as having left off to preach Christ. Certain I am, that they who do not preach in this manner ; they who, as our present gospel preachers do, omit morality, and the obligations of a good life, in order to dwell on doctrinal points (their manner of treating which I have given a sufficient specimen of)---such a method of preaching, I say, can never do any real good ; it may do much real harm to religion. By it the weak, the ignorant, the credulous, and, let me add, the lazy Christian, is too often led to flatter himself, that Christ is to do *all*, and they themselves *nothing*, towards their salvation ; by hearing continually of free and full redemption through his blood, or never hearing of the conditions required on their parts, before they can claim the benefit of this redemption ; by being told much of *imputed* Righteousness,

Righteousness, and hearing little of the necessity of *Personal Obedience*, by such means infinite are the mistakes, and fatal are the errors, into which many unhappy creatures are driven; errors and mistakes which always would be avoided, were it more the aim of the preacher to influence the heart of his plain honest hearer with gospel precepts, enforced by gospel promises, than to perplex his understanding with hard words which he doth not comprehend, and with doctrines which, however true, are never to be inculcated, but as means and motives to direct our practice, and to train us up to piety and virtue.

Let not, therefore, all the sneering contempt, with which the conceited enthusiast treateth *Morality*, induce any one to think, that when the obligations of righteousness and temperance, and the certainty of judgment to come, that is, the obligations of virtue, enforced with gospel sanctions, are preached up to him, and *reasoned* upon by his teacher, that this is not to preach Christ. They who require other points from the pulpit are, as yet, to learn wherein true religion consisteth, and what it is that God required of man. The *Tillotsons*, the *Souths*, the *Sharps*, the *Wakes*, who were once, and the *Sherlocks*, the *Seckers*, the *Pearces*, and the *Hoadleys*, who are still the ornaments of

our church, by such sermons have raised to themselves a reputation founded on the firmest ground ; and their labours will ever, in the judgment of sober piety and solid learning, be esteemed as proper models for inferior preachers to form themselves by ; while the wild rants of a fanatic *Methodist*, and the whimsical dreams of a fanciful *Hutchinsonian*, meet with that contempt which they deserve.

The preacher who aimeth to lift up his hearers into the clouds of *Allegory*, or to lose them in the wilds of *Mysticism*, who maketh it his favourite view to interpret, or rather to torture Scripture into meanings which only a warm imagination could discover, and which the breath of cool reason will blow away ; who placeth the defence of Christianity on a foundation liable to be shaken by every feeble attack ; supporting it by such arguments as Christians themselves are not agreed about, and making it to consist in something which the wisest of Christians do not comprehend :----the preacher, I say, who doth this, regardless of inculcating to his hearers the eternal obligations of piety to God, and of christian obedience in every instance of virtuous practice ; such a preacher, with all his earnestness of address, with all his pomp of delivery, and solemnity of manner,

ner, may indeed be able to light up, in the breasts of the credulous and the ignorant, the false glare of *Enthusiasm*; but never can kindle, in the minds of any serious worshiper, the pure flame of *Religion*: his discourses will frequently mislead, but never can instruct; they may corrupt the heart, but they can never inform the head; they may puzzle our *Faith*, but they can never correct our *Morals*; they must disgust every Christian who is not captivated by sounds, and is so well acquainted with his religion, as to be sorry to see it supported by rotten props; and, lastly, they can never fail to please the enemies of the gospel, who can desire nothing more than to see its preachers draw such pictures, and exhibit such defences of it, as have a natural tendency to furnish out new matter of exultation to future *Humes* and future *Bolingbrokes*.

Having thus given my sentiments, warmly perhaps, but honestly, on a subject of the greatest consequence, if what is connected with the interest of the gospel of Christ be a subject of this kind, I cannot conclude without taking notice of the long, the unparalleled meekness of the Clergy of the established church, in bearing with silence, a silence worthy of their characters, the gross, the undeserved insults they have met with, and

daily do meet with, from a set of men whose power of extending their influence, and whose success in scattering their abuse, have been owing solely to their connexion with that body of men whom they thus impudently set themselves up to asperse. The same views of moderation and peace, have, no doubt, induced that great and learned *Pre-late*, within whose diocese the principal scene of action lieth, to forbear any interposition of episcopal jurisdiction to silence, by authority, what he hoped and trusted would disappear by contempt. Such a plan of conduct is most agreeable to the noble and generous principles of protestantism, which shun every appearance of restraint on private judgment. But tho' authority is, and ought to be silent, reason and argument are permitted to *cry aloud, and spare not*. And something appeared necessary to be offered upon this occasion to the public, lest silence should be construed into confession of guilt, and the false charges brought against the clergy should gain ground, merely because they are not thought worthy of an answer. This, therefore, hath given rise to the foregoing remarks, which I have not had leisure to range into method, nor abilities to dress up in the ornaments of style : but this, I hope, I have been able to do, to express my

my meaning with clearness, and to support my assertions by facts.

My name I conceal, because, were it to be mentioned, it would be as much unknown as it now is. My profession I *will* not conceal : I own, and I am proud to own it, that I am *One* of that numerous body whom a bold *Libeller* hath represented as *Apostates from the Doctrines of the Reformation, and as making no Conscience of Oaths and Subscriptions*. With how little truth such a charge was urged, I hope, I have shewn : and, if I have shewn this, I trust to the candor of *my Brethren*, in particular, that they will overlook the imperfections of a performance whose only merit consisteth in its being the performance of one who meaneth well ; and I trust to the common honesty of *Christians*, in general, that they will set a mark upon that invenomed pen which could write down falsehoods of so dangerous a nature, and that they will think *that* man unworthy of being a leader in religion, who could be guilty of so signal an instance of *groundless* calumny and *vile* abuse.

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